



Report to Policy Committee

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Report of: *Director of Public Health*

Report to: *Finance Sub Committee*

Date of Decision: *22 March 2023*

Subject: Supporting People through the cost of living via Citizens Advice Sheffield

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? <i>1468</i>				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-				
<i>“The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”</i>				

Purpose of Report:

The cost-of-living crisis is having a profound impact on the people of Sheffield. SCC and partners in the public and voluntary and community sector have developed an incident management response with an action plan to provide support and advice to those who are being most impacted.

This paper seeks to propose a one-off grant investment from the Public Health grant reserve of £300,000 in Citizens Advice Sheffield to increase capacity and support to people with their money at such a challenging time.

Recommendations:

1. Note the proposal as part of the Council's incident management response action plan to the Cost of Living
2. Approve a one-off grant investment from the Public Health grant reserve of £300,000 to Sheffield Citizen's Advice for the proposal as detailed in this report

Background Papers:**May 2022**

[Sheffield City Council - Decision - Supporting Sheffielders Through the Cost-of-Living Crisis](#)

July 2022

[Sheffield City Council - Decision - Cost of Living Crisis Strategy and Action Plan](#)

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: <i>Anna Beeby</i>
		Legal: <i>Tarmina Saville</i>
		Equalities & Consultation: <i>Ed Sexton</i>
		Climate: <i>Jessica Rick</i>
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	SLB member who approved submission:	<i>(Insert name of relevant Executive Director)</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	<i>(Insert name of relevant Member)</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: <i>Emma Dickinson</i>	Job Title: <i>Strategic Commissioning Manager</i>
	Date: <i>23 March 2023</i>	

Purpose of the report

1. This report informs Committee about how Citizens Advice Sheffield are developing and evolving their model for the people of Sheffield and how the Council's core grant investment will be used to support this.
2. The report also seeks approval for a one-off grant investment Citizens Advice Sheffield to support the cost-of-living action plan.

Background

3. At its meeting on the 31st May 2022, Strategy and Resources Committee agreed to introduce citywide incident response-style arrangements to co-ordinate the city's response to the cost of living crisis which is having profound implications for citizens and businesses.
4. At its meeting on the 5th July 2022, Strategy and Resources Committee agreed the action plan for addressing the cost-of-living crisis in Sheffield.

The cost-of-living crisis is bringing real hardship to Sheffielders in all communities.

5. The cost-of-living crisis is beginning to have a significant impact on people in every part of our city.
6. Poverty was already increasing in Sheffield before Covid hit and the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and disproportionately affected the city's poorest communities.
7. We are seeing real incomes reducing, costs increasing with inflation which is affecting energy, food, and rent. We are also seeing an increase in illegal money lending, with people increasingly using them for essentials. For further details about the impacts see Cost of Living Crisis paper from Strategy and Resources on 31st May 2022:
[Sheffield City Council - Decision - Supporting Sheffielders Through the Cost-of-Living Crisis](#)

Citizens Advice nationally were reporting that November 2022 was the largest number of people accessing support on record.

8. The national CAB dashboard described the most frequent issues for people in Sheffield are: council tax arrears is still the most common form of debt people and Universal Credit is the most common benefit issue.
[CA cost of living data dashboard | Flourish](#)

Citizens Advice Sheffield (CAS) changed their delivery model overnight to respond to covid and lockdown to ensure there was no gap in service / support to people.

9. CAS continue to deliver most of their services via telephone and digital

with staff and volunteers working a hybrid model. The number of people supported has increased 35% in 3 years, from 20,049 (18/19) to over 27,000 (21/22). In 18/19 they secured an extra £6.6million income for people and in 21/22 it was more than £11million.

10. 29% of the people CAS are supporting are those neighbourhoods of greatest need, Burngreave followed by Manor, then Firth Park and Darnall wards respectively. The proportion of people who have a disability or long-term illness has remained consistent at 41-42%. The proportion from an ethnic minority background has reduced slightly from 31% to 29%.
11. Although most of the universal access to CAS is telephone and digital, there is face to face provision for specifically funded services mainly co-located within another service:
 - Howden House and Farm Road Social Club
 - Food Banks (weekly at Stocksbridge, Burngreave, Firth Park, Gleadless Valley, Darnall, Handsworth, Jordanthorpe, Grace, Hillsborough, Parson Cross, Woodhouse, Westfield, Wybourn)
 - People who are living in refuges fleeing domestic abuse
 - People who are in-patients on mental health wards
 - People who are attending health services, Weston Park, spinal injuries and cystic fibrosis
 - A service with a local building society (for their customers and open to anyone)
12. Post the pandemic it has become clear that there are the gaps in the universal offer due to changes in funding and service delivery. It is also important to recognise that CAS are still on the journey from their inception in late 2013 of 12 organisations into one. Many of the changes are positive as Advice Line (telephone support) has provided a more equitable universal access and is also more cost-effective. However, the closure of neighbourhood offices (acquired through the merger process and not selected to provide comprehensive city wide access) and the loss of some targeted provision due to funding has undoubtedly left some communities and people feeling unable to access the support despite other initiatives such as community language lines, community access points and targeted provision through a wide range of partner organisations.

CAS will use the year ahead to really understand the needs of communities now, define and adapt the post-pandemic model.

13. There has been face to face appointments for some time with capacity now up to 75 per week. These appointments are not open access or drop in but are pre booked at a city centre location. There are criteria for appointments: advice for deaf people, housing, immigration and Pension Wise.
14. Face to face appointments are also available at the discretion of the advisor in cases of digital exclusion, language barriers that can't be

effectively mitigated with Language Line, a protected characteristic that necessitates face to face advice as a reasonable adjustment or complexity or urgency of the case.

15. The demand and use of city centre face to face appointments will be continually reviewed and used to shape the delivery model.
16. Using the monies in this proposal, there will be a reinstating of some face-to-face provision targeting ethnic minority communities. For some groups there have seen reductions in the numbers of people that are supported and new census data will also help identify any newer groups that are not currently accessing support.
17. Insight and data will be core to establishing a delivery model that is right for the needs of the city and its diverse communities. CAS are planning community engagement work to build trust and credibility in communities and design provision that works but also fits within resourcing. We will work in partnership with CAS and public health to review and refresh the original needs analysis that was undertaken when CAS was established.

There is an aging workforce within the advice sector and an inability to recruit trained advice workers is a national problem.

18. CAS are mitigating the workforce issues through reshaping their roles to grow their own and developing a progression pathway from adviceline workers through to full advice workers. This is strategically the right approach but is not a quick fix.
19. There is also a lack of capacity through reduced number of volunteers as many of the 140 left during the pandemic when services moved to the phone, with only approx. 20-30 remaining.
20. The senior management team at CAS have undertaken a listening exercise with each volunteer and feedback has shown that:
 - volunteers do enjoy and successfully deliver remote advice, but many prefer to come into an office to do so
 - remote volunteering requires a different approach to supervision and support, since peer support doesn't automatically happen by virtue of co-location, time must be dedicated to it
 - volunteers actively want clear direction and regular feedback
21. Developing more and different volunteer roles will add much needed capacity to advice in Sheffield. CAS via a small amount of non-recurrent council monies is recruiting a volunteer co-ordinator post to:
 - create a portfolio of volunteer roles to match different skill sets and interests (some people want to stick to simple signposting and triage, others enjoy in-depth appeal work)
 - recruit a new intake of volunteers with a mix of motivations and from a wide range of backgrounds
 - ensure they have the right support mechanisms in place to ensure all

- volunteers have clear direction, get regular feedback, feel part of a team and have the chance to meet with other volunteers if they wish
- refine/ update volunteer training and induction
- ensure volunteers have an enjoyable and meaningful experience
- ensure volunteer roles are complementing the core service delivery

It is important that people can get good quality support and signposting immaterial to where they may seek assistance.

22. People will often seek support from organisations or professionals because of a variety of reasons: trust, know the organisation, cultural identity, face to face options. Rather than re-routing people, we want to ensure that wherever people turn for support they receive accurate information and effective signposting or onward referral as appropriate.
23. There is significant demand for up-to-date training and capacity building – 21 staff from community organisations recently attended a CAS workshop on disability benefits. A CAS youtube video guide to clip of using ‘entitled to’ benefits calculator has been added to the Council’s cost of living tool kit for all front line workers to access.
24. CAS have received funding for the next two years for a trainer focussing on front-line staff and volunteers supporting people affected by the cost-of-living crisis. The role will include relationship building, identifying needs and knowledge gaps as well as delivering training. The focus for this role is not training advice workers, rather training people to identify advice needs, signpost effectively and know when to refer to CAS for specialist advice

The council is proud of the long-standing partnership with CAS.

25. There is a strong foundation and much to build on as the partnership between CAS and SCC moves beyond pandemic delivery. The Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee approved the core service grant for CAS at the 5th December 2022 until 2028.
[Sheffield City Council - Decision - Grant Aid Programme with Voluntary and Community Strategic Partners 2023-2025](#)
26. We are reviewing the grant agreement with CAS to ensure the outcomes fit with the needs of Sheffield now. These will include face to face provision for specific communities (based on evidence) and the underpinning roles to support volunteering and capacity building of the VCS.

This grant investment proposal of additional monies will add capacity at a time of hardship for Sheffielders and also provide seed corn funding for the transformation required.

27. Face to face capacity will be added where there is evidence of gaps in the use of the current service. There will be co-design work with

communities and organisations to develop a triage and appointment process. The evolving model will not be community drop in as previously but will meet the needs and maximise the available capacity.

28. The new face to face approach will be trialled with specific ethnic minority communities where the existing data is currently showing a reduction in use of the service: Yemini, Pakistani and Chinese communities and also people with disabilities or long-term conditions and people with limited or no access to telephone or digital services.
29. Adding capacity will not happen overnight due to the recruitment issues highlighted earlier in the paper. The monies will be used to fast-track progression routes for existing advice line workers to be trained to deliver complex face to face advice casework.
30. It is important to also build / strengthen advice capacity in community organisations and there will be a specific project to explore the best way to do this to ensure sustainable provision. This could include seconding/ training staff from other VCS organisations, upskilling volunteers, developing direct referral routes exploring seconding and/or training staff from other VCS organisations to upskill generic staff or advance the skills of existing advice workers.
31. CAS have four Community Access Points (face to face provision over video link). The additional funding will allow exploration of purchasing further CAPs and cover the costs for the community settings (rent, additional opening, private space etc) and volunteer expenses to support and guide the person using it.

Community involvement and the importance of lived experience

32. This proposal is within the Cost of Living (CoL) action plan. The incident management response to CoL is in partnership with VCS along with statutory partners. Community voice and lived experience is regularly highlighted via the community partners tactical group and has shaped this proposal.

RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

Equality Implications

33. The cost-of-living crisis is likely to have a more significant impact on some groups of people in the city than others. This is likely to include people who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act, including women, disabled people, people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds, and both older and younger people. People with caring responsibilities are also likely to be disproportionately impacted as their income tends to be lower than the population as a whole.
34. The council's response to the cost-of-living crisis is intended to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis on people and communities across the city,

including those who are most exposed to it. As described above this will include people who share certain protected characteristics. Therefore, the proposal set out in this report is intended to have an overall positive impact on equality within the city, although this will be within the wider negative context of the cost-of-living crisis.

Financial and Commercial Implications

35. The total investment outlined in this proposal is £300,000 from the ring-fenced public health grant reserve budget.

Legal Implications

36. The Council has a general power under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that an individual may generally do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation and the power is exercised in accordance with the limitations specified in the Act, this gives the Council the ability to provide the grant funding.
37. The proposed grant payment to Citizens Advice Sheffield will be by way of the Council's standard Grant Agreements, providing both the Council and CAS with a clear basis and purpose for the grant funding. The grant will likely fall within the criteria of a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and therefore an assessment will need to be carried out to ensure compliance with the subsidy control principles and with the requirements.

Climate Implications

38. Given the nature of the proposal a full Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) is not considered appropriate. It is however acknowledged that the activities delivered by the CAS will have an impact on emissions. Through the review of core grant aid CAS will be asked to consider the climate impact of their services.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

39. Do nothing – this was rejected as communities across Sheffield are being impacted on by the cost-of-living crisis. Working with CAS, we hope we will help mitigate impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on communities and co-ordinate support and interventions around those that need it the most.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

40. The recommendations build on the commitments made by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 31st May and 5th July 2022 to support Sheffielders through the cost-of-living crisis.